

TYNE & WEAR
**archives &
museums**

**Lost Property Policy and
Procedures
Version 1.0**

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Document History

Version	Date	Amendment	Name/Group
0.1	22 May 2010	Document Created	Julie Pollock
0.2	22 May 2010	Document Reviewed	Phil Robinson
0.3	29 May 2010	Feedback incorporated and Draft Rewritten Sections 3.1 and 3.7 introduced.	Julie Pollock
0.3	16 June 2010	Submitted to Jackie Reynolds for comment	Phil Robinson
0.4	30 July 2010	Document reviewed	Jackie Reynolds
0.5	19 August 2010	Updated version circulated to Audit; legal; SMT for comment	Jackie Reynolds
0.6	2 September	Incorporating feedback	Jackie Reynolds
1.0	6 September	Released to Audit Committee	Jackie Reynolds
	15 September	Approved	Audit Committee

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0.1	G:\Corporate Governance Shared\Draft Policies\Lost Property\Lost Property Policy v1.0.doc	Julie Pollock

1.0	30 September	Approved	Joint Comittee
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy has been prepared to provide guidance to staff on the procedures to manage and control lost property in an open, fair and documented way, thereby protecting the interests of both employees and visitors.
- 1.2 As visitor attractions, TWAM venues by their nature have to deal with high volumes of lost and found items. TWAM has a responsibility to provide safe custody of money and other personal property handed in by staff, visitors or public found on the premises or grounds. Any such items or objects, found on TWAM premises, or within the grounds of TWAM premises, regardless of value, are considered lost property and should be dealt with as detailed below

2. Definition of Lost Property

- 2.1 'Lost property' is a broad term used to identify items that do not belong to TWAM and have been left (accidentally or otherwise) in our venues. 'Lost property' does not refer to items left in the care of staff at a venue for the duration of a visitor's stay, for example a pushchair or an item of large luggage.
- 2.2 'Lost property' also relates to an item which has been reported lost in one of our venues but has not been found by or handed in to staff there.
- 2.3 For the purposes of this policy lost property is separated into three classifications:
- (a) Perishable items.
 - (b) Low value, non-perishable items.
 - (c) Valuable items.
- 2.4 If a member of staff is unsure about the value of an item (and therefore which processing method to follow), advice should be sought from the duty key holder.

3. Finding and reporting lost property

- 3.1 The purpose of our lost property policy is to reunite lost belongings to their owners. Wherever possible, items should be returned to the people who have lost them. If there is any identifying material e.g. a name on a debit card, a name on a medicine bottle within a handbag, the name of a school on a lost lunch box, the Public Address System should be used to locate the owners. Mention of lost property should not be made, the named owner should be asked to make themselves known to a member of staff who will then tell them the location of their property.
- 3.2 All items of lost property, including articles found in cafés and function rooms, are to be collected in one designated area of each venue, for example, at the shop (or at the reception desk if different).

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- 3.3 All items of lost property are to be recorded on the “Lost Property – Item Found” form. All parts of Section 1 must be completed. For ease of identification, lost property items should be placed into a bag which should then be sealed securely closed. A self-adhesive label printed with a unique reference number (venue Name/Date/Time e.g. DM/060910/1215) should be stuck to the bag.
- 3.4 Labelled items (complete with reference numbers) should be placed into a suitable receptacle in an ascending chronological order where possible. Reference numbers and item locations should be recorded on the associated “Lost Property – Item Found” form.
- 3.5 Items should be collected in a secure place away from public access. They should be collated by the month in which they were found and stored in these groupings. There should ideally be a separate box for each month in order to make locating a particular item as easy as possible.

3.6 Additional procedures for valuable items

- 3.6.1 Items of lost property such as wallets and purses, handbags and luggage should be searched in an attempt to find some identifying information. This should always be done in the presence of at least two members of staff. Where debit/credit/other similar cards are found and the owner cannot be traced within an hour, the phone number printed on the back of the card(s) should be used to report the find to the issuing bank/company. On their advice the card should either be shredded or posted back to the relevant bank/company. All details are to be recorded on the “Lost Property – Item Found” form. All parts of Section 1 must be completed

When bags are searched, contents should be itemised as part of the item description on the “Lost Property – Item Found” form. Any medication that is found within should be stored according to the instructions given. If this means refrigeration and separation from the rest of the contents of the bag, the medication should be enclosed in a separate bag and issued with the same reference number as the remainder of the lost property. Pieces that are taken away from the main body of the lost property item should be labelled e.g. Disco0025(a) and Disco0025(b) (and so forth), (a) being the main item. The location of each piece should be carefully recorded on the relevant “Lost Property – Item Found” form.

- 3.6.2 Cash: Any cash that is handed in should be counted by in the presence of at least two members of staff. If the cash is in note form then the serial number of each note should be recorded and documented. All cash sums should be placed in a sealed security bag, and be secured in the safe. All details are to be recorded on the “Lost Property – Item Found” form. All parts of Section 1 must be completed

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- 3.6.3 Mobile Phones: On receipt of a mobile phone handed in as lost property, (providing the phone is switched on) an attempt to contact someone in the address book of the mobile phone should be made. Some people may, in their address book, have a contact under the name ice (in case of emergency). If successful the Officer should request that the person answering the phone give a name of the owner and if possible an alternative contact number or address. The TWAM member of staff can also ask the person answering the call to inform the owner that their phone is in our possession. Once contact has been made the phone (if switched on) should be turned off and placed in a security bag and be placed in the safe. All details are to be recorded on the “Lost Property – Item Found” form. All parts of Section 1 must be completed.
- 3.6.4 Any other valuable items, including cameras and mobile music players should be immediately processed and placed into a safe or similar limited-access location. All details are to be recorded on the “Lost Property – Item Found” form. All parts of Section 1 must be completed. The Police should be informed by the end of the working day so that their records of lost property can be updated as appropriate.
- 3.7 All completed forms should be collected together in a file kept at the shop, or wherever visitor enquiries are directed. It is important to have this information close at hand to be able to efficiently reunite lost property with its owner.
- 3.8 If a member of the public wishes to report an item lost within our venues, the “Lost Property – Item Reported Lost” form should be completed. All parts of Section 1 must be completed. A full description of the item(s) should be obtained, details of where and when the item was lost, approximate time and date and any distinguishing marks to support proof of ownership. The person reporting the loss should be given a copy of the form, which will be required in the event that a match can be made between an Item Reported Lost and an Item Found.

4. Returning lost property

- 4.1 Property should be returned to the owner if staff are satisfied they are the rightful owner.
- 4.2 A full description of the item(s) should be obtained, details of where and when the item was lost, approximate time and date and any distinguishing marks to support proof of ownership. This description should be matched to details given on “Lost Property – Item Found” forms. Identification of the visitor should also be sought. In the event of a dispute, a Museum Services Manager (MSM), Museum Services Officer (MSO) or duty key holder should be asked to make a final decision.
- 4.3 For record purposes it is important that the rightful owner signs, dates and supplies an address in the found property book when collecting the item.

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Section 2 of the “Lost Property – Item Found” form should be completed. This personal information is to be taken and protected in accordance with Data Protection legislation. (See 4.4).

It is recommended that the collection of valuable property be conducted or overseen by an MSO or MSM.

- 4.4 Completed “Lost Property – Item Found” forms are to be removed from the general lost property paperwork file when the item has been claimed. Forms should be given to the MSM and filed securely. This practice is to reduce the exposure of personal details such as names and addresses of lost property claimants.

5. Retention Periods for Lost Property

- 5.1 Perishable items (foodstuffs, liquids) are to be kept until the venue’s closing time on the day in which they were found (or less as deemed appropriate per individual case). After this time any unclaimed items should be disposed of safely. In incidences where a lunchbox or cooler bag (or similar) has been left at a venue with perishable items inside, the perishables should be disposed of and the boxes and bag kept as per the recommendations for items of their type.
- 5.2 Non-perishable items (such as bags, clothing or toys) are to be kept for three calendar months in order to allow rightful owners time to claim their property.
- 5.3 Valuable items (cameras, mobile phones, wallets, handbags) are to be kept for three calendar months in order to allow their rightful owners to claim their property.

6. Unclaimed Lost Property

- 6.1 At the start of each month, a member of staff (authorised by each venue’s MSM) should review the items that have been held from three calendar months previously.
- 6.2 Non valuable items which remain unclaimed are to be disposed of either by donation to a charity or the items should be destroyed. An itemised receipt should be obtained from the charity shop which should then be filed with all other lost property documents. The resulting cash should be donated in accordance with 6.4. The forms relating to the items wasted/donated should be updated to show this change.
- 6.3 Valuable items should be transferred to the responsibility of the Police, who will then hold and dispose of these items under the terms of their own lost property policy. Forms relating to these items should be updated to reflect this transferral.

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- 6.4 Any unclaimed cash should be donated to the Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums Trust. A receipt for the amount of cash donated should be obtained from the venue's Administration Assistant and the form should be updated to show this change.

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LOST PROPERTY – ITEM FOUND

Section 1

Item Description:
(What is item? Colour, size, identifying marks. Be as thorough as possible.)

Location found: _____

Date and time: _____

Found by: _____

Form completed by: _____

Reference number and location: _____
(Format venue initials/date/time e.g. DM/060910/1215)

Additional notes:
(Has the item been moved? Enquiries about item made?)

Section 2: To be completed upon item claim.

Name of claimant: _____

Address: _____

Signature: _____

Date and time: _____

ID provided? _____

Staff Member: _____

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LOST PROPERTY – ITEM REPORTED LOST

Section 1

Item Description:
(What is item? Colour, size, identifying marks. Be as thorough as possible.)

Location lost: _____

Date and time: _____

Name of owner: _____

Contact details: _____

(Please provide a telephone number, address or email address.)

Additional notes: _____

Section 2: If this item has been located, please process as usual and enter reference number and location here:

Please contact the owner to allow them to collect their property.

Date owner contacted: _____

Staff Member: _____

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